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SUBJECT: CODEL WEXLER'S MEETING WITH DEPUTY FM AYALON

Classified By: Classified By: DCM Luis G, Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Representative Robert Wexler met with Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon on May 10. Looking toward PM Netanyahu's May 18 meeting with President Obama, Wexler advised that Netanyahu should support President Obama's engagement with Iran. Wexler said he was confident that the two leaders will surprise media doomsayers and forge a positive working relationship. Wexler expressed concern at the serious financial problems the PA is facing, and shared Ayalon's dismay over Saudi Arabia's withdrawal of most of its financial support for the PA. Ayalon promised continued Israeli support for PA President Abbas and PA Prime Minister Fayyad, but also stated that they did not want "Israeli currency be paid to satisfy someone in Saudi Arabia or Ramallah." Ayalon complained that while the issue of settlements is important, it should not be at the forefront of U.S.-Israeli relations, and that it was wrong to single out settlements as something to be solved now while at the same time considering Palestinian right of return as something to be worked out in final negotiations. Wexler cautioned that ignoring U.S. sentiment on settlements could be problematic. Commenting on his recent visit to Turkey, Wexler said that U.S. relations with Turkey were improving despite some persistent differences. End Summary.

#### POSITIVE VIEW OF PALESTINIAN SECURITY FORCE TRAINING

¶2. (C) Representative Robert Wexler (D, Florida), accompanied by Deputy Chief of Staff Joshua Rogin, Pol Couns, Poloff and Conoff (notetaker) met with Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon at MFA on May 10. Ayalon was joined by Chief of Staff David Siegel and an MFA notetaker. Wexler opened the meeting by discussing his impressions of his visit to Jericho the previous day to review training of Palestinian security personnel. The Congressman spoke personally to many of the trainees and praised the "bottom up" approach of this program. 1,600 have been trained, the US has funded the program, and between the Presidential guards and the security forces there will be close to 6,000 trained. Lt. General Dayton had earlier told Wexler that once there were 4,500 trained security forces on the ground, the degree of security in the West Bank would be substantial. Wexler was impressed with the professionalism of the trainees and of the program in general. "If this works, you can see twenty years from now that the Palestinian leaders will come from these men."

¶3. (C) Wexler mentioned that the security forces are not well armed, in part because U.S. legislation bars U.S. provision of lethal equipment to the PA. The PA security forces will instead be getting arms from the Russians. Wexler added that Congress should take another look at our laws. To get around the lack of munitions, security forces must pool the resources they have when working in various parts of the West Bank.

#### MEETINGS WITH THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP

¶4. (C) Ayalon reported that although Abu Mazen and Salam

Fayyad so far had refused to meet PM Netanyahu, "we still want to support them." Wexler reported that there will be a vote on supplemental funding for assistance to the Palestinians in Congress this week. This vote is somewhat controversial because of the Administration's amendment to enable assistance to a unity government that adheres to the principles of the Quartet. Some Democrats and Republicans alike had reservations.

15. (C) Wexler observed that the PA has enormous money problems and cited the lack of support from the Saudis. Wexler said that the Saudi Ambassador in Washington makes impressive and thoughtful speeches but the actions that the Saudis are taking undermine the goals they are enunciating. There was speculation as to why the Saudis are not supporting the PA financially, with one reason possibly being that the Saudis are engaged in a process of reconciliation with Syria designed to "peel Asad away from Iran" and for this reason are not supporting the PA or the moderates in Lebanon.

#### REGIONAL VIEWS

16. (C) Ayalon said that the USG's extension of sanctions against Syria was "judicious." Israel's assessment is that Bashar Asad does not really care about the return of the Golan and only wants the economic benefits he derives from Iran and Lebanon, while maintaining the "perception of talks with Israel. Ayalon stated that the Egyptians are flabbergasted about the Iranian connection to Gaza and Hizballah's efforts to undermine Mubarak. He said that while Iran wants to be a superpower, in fact Iran has many points of vulnerability, including a weak economy, serious social

TEL AVIV 00001070 002 OF 003

problems, and restive minorities. Ayalon opined that President Obama's approach to engagement is "ingenious." If it doesn't work, then the U.S. will be in a better position to take action. Wexler added that we know this is not a long term strategy and that we aren't talking about a five- year program of engagement, but rather maybe 5-8 months.

#### OBAMA - NETANYAHU MEETING ON MAY 18

17. (C) Wexler wanted to discuss the buildup to the President's meeting with the PM on May 18th. Wexler opined that thousands of reporters have already written their article about an Obama-Netanyahu train wreck and that all they need is the headline. Wexler indicated that the President will most likely lead with his Iran policy, but cautioned that the President did not need coaxing or suggestions from anyone regarding Iran. Wexler offered that it would be better if the Israelis participate in the policy rather than complain that engagement is appeasement.

18. (C) Wexler commented that the President is staunchly pro-Israel, although not supportive of some positions associated with the Likud Party. Israel should take advantage of this President who has the ability to communicate in ways that previous Presidents could not. Ayalon and Wexler agreed that the May meeting presents a historic opportunity. Wexler urged the Israelis to help us devise the strategy. The worst thing would be for the notion to take hold in Washington that we need to hold back on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations due to the Israelis.

19. (C) Ayalon thanked Wexler for his thoughtful assessment, noting that the Israeli government understands what is at stake. Their concern is that "Israeli currency not be paid here to satisfy someone in Saudi Arabia or Ramallah." Ayalon quoted from the President's book that "foreign policy should be based on facts rather than wishful thinking." If there is a Palestinian unity government, it must be on the basis of Fatah coopting Hamas and not the reverse. Wexler interjected that based on his meetings with the Palestinians, there is a 0% chance of a unity government this year. Ayalon noted that

Israel would like Fatah to be more credible and to strengthen Egypt and the secular Sunni regimes in the area.

#### CHANGING VIEW OF SETTLEMENTS IN THE U.S.

¶10. (C) Wexler pointed out that the ground has changed in Washington with regard to settlements. Israelis should understand that American views from four or five years ago no longer prevail. There is a group of 15-20% who have always been against settlements. Now, however, there is a much larger group, including many traditional friends of Israel, who are saying that the time has come for an appropriately defined Israeli settlement policy. If the GOI tries to ignore settlements, there will be friction with the U.S. Wexler suggested that Israel take the initiative with a new settlements policy. This would give the President the opportunity to test the moderate Arab world on their views and ask them to specify next steps in terms of normalization. If Israel tried to ignore the growing sentiment against settlements in the U.S., this could be problematic.

¶11. (C) Ayalon responded that settlements are important, but they should not be at the forefront of U.S.-Israeli relations. Ayalon complained that the international community views settlements as something that should be settled now while "right of return" for the Palestinians is something to worked out in final status negotiations. Either both are final negotiation issues or both should be handled now. Wexler countered that a moratorium or freeze is a tactic, not a final status outcome. Ayalon noted that settlements were not an obstacle to Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1981 and or from Gaza in 2005. Foreign Minister Lieberman lives in a settlement, but has expressed willingness to give up his home if necessary to achieve a serious peace arrangement. The political situation in Israel requires that Netanyahu be sensitive to domestic politics. From the Israeli perspective there are different categories of settlements. Large blocs such as Ma'aleh Adumim are small cities with tens of thousands of inhabitants. New construction is only normal.

#### U.S.-TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

¶12. (C) Wexler commented that U.S. relations with Turkey have improved following the President's visit. Wexler said he met with the new Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, and called him a strategic thinker who is the smartest man in the Prime Minister's office. He is also Turkey's first

TEL AVIV 00001070 003 OF 003

Islamist Foreign Minister. Wexler noted that Davutoglu had told him with pride that "Erdogan is now the Sultan of the Arab street," but a Turkish MFA official who followed Wexler out of the meeting commented that not all Turks were comfortable with Erdogan's new role. Wexler said that Erdogan appears to identify his own struggle with Turkey's secular authorities with the experience of Hamas. Wexler commented that Erdogan took it as a personal affront when Olmert met with him only a few days prior to Operation Cast Lead and didn't reveal the plan. Wexler added that despite the recent events, he believes that the fundamentals of Turkish- Israeli relations remain intact.

¶13. (U) CODEL Wexler did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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